
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Mount Pleasant Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	1710 Irving Street NW	
Meeting Date:	July 22, 2021	(x) New construction
Case Number:	21-414	(x) Concept

The applicants, property owners Marcia Berthin and Charles St Johnston, request the Board's review of a concept to construct a two-story accessory building, to accommodate occupiable space over a garage.

Although the construction of garages is typically not an issue, a two-story accessory building remains unusual in Mount Pleasant. On this second-longest alley in the neighborhood, lined by more than 120 primary structures, there are 23 garages, all one-story.¹ There is only one spot in Mount Pleasant where one-and-a-half and two-story accessory buildings could be called common: the alley behind the large, detached homes on the 1700 and 1800 blocks of Park Road, the earliest phase of suburban subdivision. Several others once stood in this northeastern portion of the neighborhood, but they were demolished for redevelopment.

Most of the neighborhood was developed for streetcar and automobile commuting, not for hayburners. Households were generally not affluent enough to support an in-house chauffeur. In fact, most rowhouses have always lacked even the modest one-story garages typical of the 1910s and 1920s, while others had single-bay garages built into their basements. A couple of two-story garages stand behind two of the larger semidetached houses on Lamont Street, but the real anomaly is one behind a rowhouse at 3132 19th.

The following are the extant carriage houses and garages exceeding one story erected before the designation of the Mount Pleasant Historic District:

- 3303 18th Street (1.5 stories)
- 3324 18th Street (2 stories)
- 1827 Park Road (1.5 stories)
- 1835 Park Road (2 stories)
- 1841 Park Road (1.5 stories)
- 1843 Park Road (1.5 stories)
- 1857 Park Road (2 stories)
- 1734 Lamont Street (2 stories)
- 1753 Lamont Street (2 stories)
- 3132 19th Street (2 stories)

¹ One garage is five-bay, another is merely a carport.

If we turn to the few two-story accessory structures that the Board has approved in the historic district, we find two situations. First is a one-off: the loose reconstruction of a deteriorated frame carriage house serving 3305 and 3307 18th Street (2018). Then, there are four that, not coincidentally, stand near the historic two-story garage at 3132 19th Street. Although the southern half of Mount Pleasant has had only a couple of similar height historically, the Board supported such structures at 3304 19th (2017), 3308 19th (2006) and 3310 19th (2007), because of the steep grade falling behind the houses. The accessory buildings were built into the grade, and the houses tower over them. The houses across the alley are reasonably distant.

The present proposal is something of the reverse of this condition; the subject row sits well below the alley grade and would stand below the garage. The houses across the alley are about on the alley grade and nearly as close to the garage as the subject house itself. There are no nearby two-story accessory buildings.

HPO cannot support the proposed building in this location based simply on the development pattern of the neighborhood to date. There is no basis in the immediate context, nor in the general context of the historic district, to indicate that a two-story accessory building is compatible with their character. The new construction may adapt the property for current use, but it would not retain or enhance the character of a two-story row. One might overlook a single example of anything as not spoiling the character of the historic district overall, but the protection of the general context and character is the most important principle here. If a two-story structure is considered compatible in this specific context—sitting above the house in a location where there have been none—then logical consistency would suggest that there are few locations in Mount Pleasant that should not receive such a building, assuming they could accommodate its footprint.² Of course, if the Board feels comfortable that such a development pattern is sufficiently compatible, it may approve the concept.

If the Board does approve the concept, the project may be delegated to staff for further review of specifics of materials and products.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board not approve the concept, because it is inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation law.

² Conceivable exceptions might include locations not abutting an alley or at an intersection with a street.